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DECORATION & FURNITURE

LUSTRA PAINTING—A NEW ART.



It is probable that the new and attractive art of lustra painting is entirely unknown in America, as it has been but a short time before the English public, and the inventor, Mr. James Elliott, who is an artist of repute and has a true artist's respect for his work, refuses to allow it to go into shops or any of the world's common markets of human ingenuity and skill. Hence it has made its way to public recognition solely through its own merits and from its own "coigns of vantage" in the churches, mansions, and palaces which it decorates.

It is always difficult to describe, in writing, artistic work of which no conception already exists in the reader's mind. Particularly is it difficult in this case, the great novelty and charm of the work being perhaps not more form and color than effect, and artistic effects are usually indescribable. In form and color the work may be made as pure and delicate or as opulent and splendid as individual taste and skill may direct, but a peculiarity of the art is that a charming effect may be produced by the veriest novice, not color-blind, even without practical knowledge of drawing or painting.

Lustra painting is an invention for household decoration, and belongs, by reason of its facility of manipulation and its demands upon refined and delicate taste, to feminine hands. It may be used for almost everything susceptible of ornamentation, from altar-cloths to ladies' dresses, and takes the place of the most laborious and expensive embroidery, at only a fraction of its time and cost. It can be applied to every fabric from velvet to linen—for curtains, screens, portières, dados, friezes, wall panels, and ladies' flounces, and also to wood and the various articles made of terra-cotta. For china painting it is not recommended, the metallic bases from which the colors are prepared suffering "change into something new and strange," and not always desirable, in the process of firing.

The effect of the work is like that of the richest velvet appliqué or most ethereal needle-work, shot through and through by a wonderful iridescence as of sparkling powdered gems. This iridescence is as remote from tawdry shining as diamond lustre is from polished glass, and would have an added charm in sunny America over those it already has in dull England. It is peculiarly effective in bright artificial light, and thus well adapted to the enriching of ball dresses as well as to the decoration of dessert table-cloths, for which latter purpose it is, at this very time of writing, being put to use by the busy, artistic fingers of the Princess Beatrice for the dining-hall of Balmoral Castle.

The colors, as I have said, are prepared from metallic bases, but the fabrication of them is a secret resting with the inventor, of whom only they can be obtained. They are sold in boxes of three sizes, costing five shillings, ten shillings and sixpence, and one guinea, and

each contains all the necessary colors, variety being obtained by mixtures just as on an artist's palette of oil colors. The lustra colors are all dry and are mixed on a peculiar palette with little saucer-like hollows to hold them in fluid form. They are used with a colorless medium, a bottle of which accompanies each box. The material, silk, velvet, cloth, linen, what not, requires no preparation whatever, no sizing, or body color. The colors once laid on are firm, and the decorated garment or article may be folded in the most minute folds or freely brushed, without losing its brilliancy. Used on linen for doilies and table covers it may be even washed, always however on the reverse side and with brushing instead of rubbing. The colors are expected to support well all the climatic changes which

a cheap imitation of something better it might possibly be recommended for some purposes but never as true decorative art. It is not an imitation, however, for it shows its originality at a glance, and the better artist she is who works at it—not merely the better crafts-woman—the nobler will be her work.

One of the most beautiful objects in this style of work that I have seen was a folding screen of five panels. The ground was of pale gray satin with the very faintest possible dream of a rose flush over it, and the paintings were alternately flowers and foliage of the horse-chestnut, pomegranates and foliage, tiger-lilies, sunflowers and ripe grapes, all treated so decoratively and with such just subordination of nature to art, and with such a perfect sense of tone even with such vary-

ing color, that it was a delight to the eye, as well as a wonder to the mind that it was all so quickly and easily done. Another screen was also of pale gray, this time without the Aurora flush, and was painted with wayward, slender-leaved vines, treated conventionally and with a very Japanese effect. There was also a portière of dull crimson silk painted in gold with a conventional Renaissance pattern, Roman vases and arabesque designs of flowers, fruit and foliage such as exist nowhere on earth save in art. This portière of rich lined silk was bought for twenty-five guineas; had it been wrought stitch by stitch in gold thread to exactly the same pattern and decorative effect, hundreds could scarcely have bought it.

There is more than one way of lustra decoration. Usually the painting is combined with outlines done in silk in plain crewel stitch, although often it is used with no embroidered lines at all. In the latter case the painting is flatter, more dreamy or spectral in effect, and particularly adapted to the style of decoration which the Japanese and mediæval tastes of the day have declared shall be high art. When the painting is combined with embroidery stitch the effect is much more gorgeous, the high relief becoming sculptural and sculptured gems at that. The pattern is outlined, and all the fine sprays, tendrils, and veinings of leaves wrought with silk in crewel stitch. These outlines are then, with the sparkling paint-loaded brush, filled in with heavy impasto up to the level of the wrought line. The embroidered forms and lines are always preserved, visible to the eye, and

give the work much the look, although far more splendid, of the appliqué embroideries one sees on the "Cinq-Mars" bed canopies and hangings in the Cluny at Paris.

MARGARET BERTHA WRIGHT.

THE best way to paint greenhouses and conservatories is to make the framework two shades of brown olives, or olive browns. The contrast thus effected between the neutral brown of the sash frames and the foliage and flowers inside is a most pleasing one, and the plants inside are perceived sooner than if the frames were painted white, this latter obtruding itself on the sight before the eye can reach the flowers.



EBONY SECRETARY BELONGING TO MARIE ANTOINETTE.

IN THE LATE HAMILTON COLLECTION. (SEE PAGE 99.)

might reasonably be expected to dim their lustre, and elaborate piano cloths decorated with them have already been ordered from India. I have even seen a beautiful object decorated by this art, for another and gloomier purpose. It was a large square of creamy-white cloth, thick and soft as cloth could be, painted with pearly shimmering lilies and large dewy green leaves, and was intended for the coffin cover of a millionaire's only child.

This art has the advantage over needle-work of being infinitely quicker of execution and far less expensive in material. It is just as artistic, equal play being given to the eye and hand, even though its ease and facility may seem to make it inartistic to some. If it were